

Setting up the default key assignments for the “VarioHID” communication protocol of the VarioHID 40 braille display in the JAWS and NVDA screen readers on Microsoft Windows

VarioHID 40

APPLICATION NOTE

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1. About this application note

New on the VarioHID 40 is the selectable communication protocol “VarioHID”, which implements the HID braille standard. More and more screen readers support this standard, but not yet the default key assignments for many braille displays. This document describes how to set up the default key assignments for the VarioHID 40 manually in JAWS and NVDA on Windows.

2. Background: HID braille and VarioHID

HID-braille is a standard that allows braille displays to work without their own driver. The operating system recognises the display like a keyboard or a mouse, and the screen reader addresses it through the same interface. You connect the VarioHID 40 and can start reading without installing anything first.

For the VisioBraille Vario braille displays, we have defined how the display keys are mapped to the controls of the HID braille standard. We call this definition the “VarioHID” protocol. The advantage of this standardisation is that all devices implementing this protocol can be interchanged without having to set anything up again on the end device or in the screen reader.

Since the HID braille protocol was introduced in various screen readers, no default key assignments have yet been stored for many braille displays. The basic functions therefore work straight away; you set up the complete key assignments yourself once. The following sections describe how to set up the familiar key assignments for the VarioHID 40 in JAWS and NVDA.

3. JAWS: Setting up the default key assignments

JAWS version 2026 does not yet ship with default key assignments for the VarioHID 40, so initially only the basic functions are active.

3.1 Setting up the key assignments

Set up the default key assignments in the “VarioHID” operating mode as follows:

1. Press the Windows key and R, type “%AppData%\Freedom Scientific\JAWS\2026\Settings\enu” and press Enter. With a German JAWS installation, the last folder is called “deu”.
2. If the file “default.jkm” is not there, copy it from the downloaded ZIP file into this folder and continue with step 5.
3. If “default.jkm” exists, make a backup copy first: select the file and press Ctrl+C and then Ctrl+V. Windows creates the copy “default - Copy.jkm”.
4. Open “default.jkm” in Notepad, add the content of the file “JAWS.txt” from the ZIP file at the end and save the file.
5. Restart JAWS.

Alternatively, you can replace “default.jkm” with the file of the same name from the ZIP file. Any custom key assignments in this file will be lost.

3.2 Checking the setup

Press display keys D1+D2+D5 on the VarioHID 40. JAWS then turns on keyboard help, and pressing the keys again turns it off. You will find all key commands in the user manual of the VarioHID 40.

3.3 If the key assignments do not work

Set the VarioHID 40 to the “VarioHID” operating mode and enable “HID Braille” in the braille display settings of JAWS. No driver or extension is required. JAWS supports HID braille from version 2026 onwards.

4. NVDA: Setting up the default key assignments

NVDA version 2026.1 does not yet ship with default key assignments for the VarioHID 40, so initially only the basic functions are active.

4.1 Setting up the key assignments

Set up the default key assignments in the “VarioHID” operating mode as follows:

1. Press the Windows key and R, type “%AppData%\nvda” and press Enter.
2. If the file “gestures.ini” is not there, copy it from the downloaded ZIP file into this folder and continue with step 5.
3. If “gestures.ini” exists, make a backup copy first: select the file and press Ctrl+C and then Ctrl+V. Windows creates the copy “gestures - Copy.ini”.
4. Open “gestures.ini” in Notepad, add the content of the “gestures.ini” from the ZIP file at the end and save the file. If a section with the same heading in square brackets already exists, add the new lines under it instead of creating the heading a second time.
5. Restart NVDA.

4.2 Checking the setup

Press display keys D1+D2+D5 on the VarioHID 40. NVDA then turns on input help, and pressing the keys again turns it off. You will find all key commands in the user manual of the VarioHID 40.

4.3 If the key assignments do not work

Set the VarioHID 40 to the “VarioHID” operating mode. In NVDA, go to “Settings” and “Braille”, set braille display detection to “Automatic” and enable “Standard HID Braille Display”. No driver or extension is required. NVDA supports HID braille from version 2021.3 onwards.

5. Contact

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